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ASSIGNMENT TO FIRST GRADE.

I HAVE long felt that greater care should be taken, in assigning pupils to first grade, to ascertain if they are mentally equipped for the business of learning to read and write. From time immemorial it has been assumed that when a child is six years of age it is ready for the serious business of the school, and in most cases no other qualification is looked for. Would it not be just as logical and just as pedagogical to say, "The child is seven, it should go to second grade;" and so on? In fact, greater care should be taken in determining the fitness of pupils to enter first grade than for any other grade in the school. If this were done, much of the later haziness, uncertainty, and discouragement on the part of the child would be obviated; also much of the dislike for school which many times comes to those who are *left over* at the end of the first year. My experience has been that these "left overs" work under difficulties all through the school, often become troublesome, and rarely, if ever, do satisfactory work.

In experimenting with this thought in mind, I took two children from the kindergarten—one a few months over five years of age, the other six years of age. Both were strong, healthy children, but of an entirely different nervous temperament. I took them into a first-grade room with a beginning first-grade class. I found a very great difference in their ability to react to the demands of the new environment. In the older child muscular co-ordination was so weak that it was impossible for it to reproduce writing, a simple picture or drawing, or to make simple objects of paper, with any degree of accuracy; while the younger at the first attempt usually produced results quite similar to the copy. The older child could not remember the symbols associated with pictures or actions, while the younger remembered two out of three the following day. In short, at the end of a week's time one could not notice that the older child had made any progress. It could not adjust itself; it was not interested.

The point is that the older child was really less mature than the younger. The time had not come for persistent imitation instead of simple imitation. There was no ability for repeated effort; no ability to hold the presentation in the attention and to compare the results of the first attempt with second and third, etc. Therefore the child was incapable of taking up the first-grade work. On request of the parent, the child was taken from the kindergarten and put in first grade. Results proved what I had anticipated. At the end of four months it was still the kindergarten child—restless and inattentive, because uninterested. The younger child could more properly have taken up the work, yet did not do so until a year later—who can doubt with how much greater gain?

It is not to be inferred that the transition was too sudden. Many of our first-grade teachers nowadays introduce their pupils to reading and numbers very carefully. Nevertheless, owing to the vast difference in the degree of maturity of these six-year-old children, many of them are led to these subjects before there is ability or motive on their part. The motive is the teacher's, and the more ability she has, the less harm there is done.

It may be said that the above are special cases, but I have no doubt that, if principals would look into the matter more carefully, many such would be found. The assignment to first-grade should be controlled by the principal just as those to any other grade. I think there should be a class in every school where these immature six-year-olds could continue working under the kindergarten idea, until the teacher would be forced in self-defense to teach them to read and write.

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